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***Whether you like yours crisp and light or serious and complex
Rosé season is any season in Pays d'Oc***

It has become a truism to state the surge in popularity and sales of rosé wines over the past decade. The colour has unleashed the creative genius of winegrowers around the world, not least so in the South of France, its original birthplace. Under the Pays d'Oc IGP label, which encompasses a 120,000-hectare swathe of vineyards running parallel with a 200-kilometre stretch of the Mediterranean coastline, the diversity of weather patterns, soil types and landforms has fostered a huge variety of rosé wine styles. Growers have been able to delve into a treasure trove of grape varieties – 58 varieties are permitted across the colour spectrum – to feed the world's insatiable thirst for rosé, and satisfy their own creative bent.

Over one in four bottles of Pays d'Oc IGP wines are rosé and while the majority is made from blends based on Grenache and Cinsault, they show true Pays d'Oc IGP character with the introduction of different varieties as well as a unique range of single varietals.

As the global rosé market matures, so too does the range of Pays d'Oc IGP offerings. Innovative rosé winemaking techniques such as barrel maturation, ageing on the lees, co-fermentation of different varieties and wild ferments are being successfully implemented in a bid to extend the longevity and complexity of rosé wines. A decline in the seasonality of rosé consumption, along with increased competition within the category, make it essential to up the ante and deliver age-worthy bottlings and complex rosés that can sit comfortably alongside gourmet foods, and drink well two or three years down the line – and counting.

There is still plenty of room, though, for the joyful, spontaneous rosés for all those casual, al fresco occasions.

Organic, biodynamic and vegan rosés are also being factored into the equation, extending the range even further, and growers are increasingly experimenting with more offbeat grape varieties, such as Marselan, Petit Verdot and Sauvignon gris.

The result is an endless choice of rosé wines that not only suit any occasion, but also run the gamut in terms of pricing, and pink hues, from light shell pink and blush through to pale red.

As spring gradually eases into summer, then autumn and winter, Elizabeth Gabay MW has selected an array of rosés that range from crisp, lively and lifted to more brooding, intense, food-friendly wines. Together, they ensure a crowd-pleasing collection for newbies through to seasoned enthusiasts.

Grenache

Regarded as the variety par excellence across southern France because of its ability to achieve ripe sugars and fruit and produce pale rosés. The natural ripeness of this variety contributes a round creamy richness to the rosé. Grenache is also the key contributor to the peachy shell-like colour.

Villa Blanche, Calmel & Joseph Very pale shell pink. Creamy richness, and a hint of nutty lees character. On the palate, ripe *pêche de vigne*, orchard apples and crisp redcurrant freshness. Satisfying weight and structure with nicely balanced long fresh acidity, a hint of dry minerality on the finish and altogether very pretty.

Entre Nous, VALENSAC le Domaine Very pale, shell white hint of pink. Aromas of custard and bruised peach continue on the palate with vanilla custard, ripe peach and fresh loganberries (think pêche Melba!) Crunchy acidity and a gentle hint of phenolics, salinity and black pepper to give attractive complexity.

Gris Blanc, Gerard Bertrand white with hints of pink - gris coloured. White stone fruit aromas with hints of lemon zest, a little crunchy apple, some broad minerality. Opens out on the palate to reveal crisp white peach and apple, hints of lemon, a touch of orange zest and a whisper of minerality. A delicate aromatic wine.

Cinsault

Cinsault is often the blending partner of Grenache, its charm overlooked and unseen. Cinsault is naturally pale with pretty, floral charm and lively freshness.

Le Petit Balthazar, Pierrick Harang Wine Pale shell salmon pink. Fresh zesty wild red berries and cranberries, white stone fruit and apples give a vibrant and juicy liveliness balanced by warm ripe round fruit.

Domaine de l'Herbe Sainte Salmon pink. Floral notes and raspberry fruit on the nose. On the palate, summer flowers, sweet wild raspberries and strawberry sorbet and a touch of creamy richness. A pretty and vibrant Cinsault.

Dino Rosé, Les Collines du Bourdic Pale shell salmon pink. Quite honeyed, floral, ripe fruit aromas with a hint of ripe raspberry. Continues on the palate - honeysuckle with perfumed ripe white peach, exotic fruit and fresh acidity, its round ripeness gives weight and a hint of sweetness finishing with attractive spice and a twist of pepper.

l'Arnacœur, Joseph Castan Pale shell pink. Aromas of white fruit, nuts and a hint of beeswax. On the palate, pretty white peach fruit and crushed ripe raspberries with a richness and a vibrant acidity of lingonberry laciness. A mouth-watering finish and an underlying mineral structure give an elegant wine.

Syrah

Unsurprisingly, Syrah rosé is often identified before the first sip is even taken, its darker colour giving a blue-pink tone to the pink. The Syrah character clearly comes through on the palate too with darker fruit.

Domaine Lalaurie Pale red with orange tints. Red berry aromas. On the palate lush, juicy sour cherries, ripe redcurrants, dark, forest floor florals and a delicious intensity. The fruitiness is balanced by a firm mineral acidity with delicate herby phenolics on the finish making for a more serious, gastronomic style. Really lovely.

Les Collines du Bourdic Pale red with blue lights. Violets and red berries on the nose. On the palate, charming wild strawberries, violet notes, abundant juicy mulberries and long, crisp crunchy acidity. An elegant saline steeliness on the finish of this dark fruit, and more complex rosé, makes it both joyful and serious.

Pinot Noir

A rarity even in the Pays d'Oc IGP, a Pinot Noir rosé. The variety's silky tannins and cherry fruit can make pretty fresh simple rosés and stunning rosés with charm and complexity.

La vie est une fête 2019, Domaine du Siestou Darker pink. Almost Burgundian with ripe cherries, almonds, hints of vanilla, fresh acidity, and a zingy touch of blood orange, this rosé is seriously classy.

Marselan

Marselan is a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache, created near the town of Marseillan (hence the name) and the local variety of the Les Caves Richemer who have made this their signature grape. Commercially available for a short thirty years, this is a variety with enormous potential and one to look out for. The variety has abundant blue and black fruit with a distinctive florality and vibrant acidity.

Les Caves Richemer Pale salmon pink. Lots of red fruit and spice on the nose and pretty floral notes. Lots of juicy fruit. Ripe raspberries, juicy redcurrants with a hint of redcurrant jelly and floral notes. Slightly chalky finish, serious, muscular with a crisp acidity and great weight.

Petit Verdot

Another rarity, but Petit Verdot really does show enormous potential for joyous, fruity rosé in a quite unexpected way. Its thick skin gives a darker pink, full-bodied fruit and body. Normally used in red wine, defining it as a rosé is still new territory.

Cante Cigale, Delta Domaines Pale pink. Lots of bright fruity floral fruit aromas. On the palate bountiful red cherries, strawberry jam, hints of sugared almonds, and spicy richness with a counterpoint of salinity, this is beautifully joyful. Definitely not superficial, this is fruity and well-made.

Sauvignon Gris

An old variety, more usually known in the white wines of Bordeaux. Its gris nature comes from the hint of pink which develops in the skins of the ripened grapes and, because of its paleness, greater extraction can be obtained without gaining colour. The variety exhibits clear Sauvignon characteristics with leafy green fruit, indeed, if the pale pink colour is not evident, it could be mistaken for Sauvignon Blanc.

Griset, Les Vignobles Foncalieu Pale pink gold. Creamy faint nose. Round, rich, ripe white peach, with hints of red fruit and crisp, green apple and grassy acidity, with good weight and structure. Really lovely, rounded body, rich, ripe, a little grassy, some red fruit.

Pinot Gris

A Pinot Grigio by any other name... but like the Sauvignon Gris, benefits from being able to withstand greater extraction and yield structure. A variety which closely reflects the winemaking from intense dried apricots and spice in Alsace, to extremely neutral Veneto Pinot Grigio.

Cuvée P, Domaine La Provençière Creamy white shell pink. On the palate, delightful quince, pear and apple compote with a creamy nutty richness, matched by a youthful greengage acidity. Shows a hint of phenolics on the finish. Still very young with potential for ageing.

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